
Reinventing Security Assistance Training for the 21st Century

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Introduction

This paper addresses the various streamlining, re-engineering, automation, and information technology efforts now ongoing to develop standardized and more efficient programs to conduct our security cooperation mission as viewed from a training prospective. To date there has been a tendency to overlook training as the emphasis has been on ADP, acquisition, sales and financial integrity. Since training may have a more profound and lasting effect on the national security of United States and its foreign policy efforts, it is time for the training community to develop a strategy to meet 21st century requirements. To that end, this paper is intended to open debate among all of the training stakeholders, particularly those who work everyday down in the trenches meeting our international customers' many and varied training requirements and expectations.

Background

It has been over five years since the security assistance community as a whole began large-scale concerted efforts to reinvent itself. The initial thrust involved the capitalization of thirteen ADP systems into the Defense Security Assistance Management System (DSAMS) with the goal of reducing the cost of ADP support. By 1998 emphasis shifted to customer satisfaction issues because of the perception that direct commercial sales were overtaking foreign military sales (FMS) and because of complaints from our customers that the FMS process was slow, bureaucratic, costly, and unresponsive. Lately the emphasis has been on financial management and financial accuracy. Work has also been done on identifying performance metrics which many times only show what is easy to measure, not necessarily what is controlling or important from the customer's viewpoint. With the exception of DSAMS, which Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) controls, there has been no overall direction, guidance, or coordination of security assistance community reinventing efforts. As a result all commands are going their separate ways, at different levels, with various approaches and productive results. Recently there has been a belated effort to coordinate and prioritize the various initiatives by use of a DSCA level reinvention team working through a reinvention working group (RWG).

Current Status

With the notable exception of the training standardization working group (TSWG) of the DSAMS effort and the just concluded distance learning conference, there has been no initiative for the training community to coordinate, or even, discuss reinvention initiatives. We are all going our own way, or our service's way, or we are not playing at all. The distance learning conference was profitable but was driven by technology advances, and we had to respond. Fortunately we responded early enough to get ahead of the fast moving distance learning train. Perhaps this could serve as an example to all to respond to the reinvention initiatives. The TSWG is not the forum

for this and in fact most of their efforts are centered on things as they were, or are now, not how they should be in the future. The TSWG did not have the authority to address the one area that might have simplified the development of the training module, namely the standardization of military department financial programs. Because of this and other reasons, we will end up with three training modules, not one! From a training perspective most of the current initiatives appear to be small steps with very limited out of the box thinking. Very few have been completely institutionalized. Most do not affect training per se. The DSAMS training module is over two years late and is over budget. Its development is consuming an exorbitant amount of our resources with no promise of providing a greatly improved product to justify its cost. Other high level initiatives appear to be directed at centralization of organizations or functions, thus making the training community part of a larger acquisition directed group. We as the training community can sit back and just react, or we can become proactive and drive where we think our future lies. To do nothing leaves us at the whims of others that may not fully appreciate our value nor understand our environment. At a minimum we owe our superiors our best efforts to articulate our concerns and recommendations to improve both our and their contribution to U.S. national security and foreign policy efforts.

The Future of Security Assistance Training

Overview

Training, as used in this paper, includes both training and education conducted as part of security assistance programs, FMS, IMET and E-IMET, and those programs conducted under the security assistance umbrella such as Expanded International Peacekeeping Capability (EIPC), International Narcotics Matters (INM) and Demining. It is assumed that any new training related programs would also be included. If there is a bias, it is that just playing at the edges of current procedures will not give the training community the resources and tools it requires to meet future needs. What is required are larger steps, out of the box initiatives, that will provide a fundamental change in the way we do business. This will involve the willingness to assume some risk but by so doing it offers opportunities in the midst of current challenges. The future will be examined from five perspectives: organization, procedures, resources, information systems, and personnel.

Organization

Organization is one area that should not change. An obvious idea when looking at ways to economize and streamline is to combine the three military department training agencies, NETSAFA, AFSAT and SATFA. The last time DSCA, then DSAA, embarked on a major look into the future, this issue was investigated in depth. Back then the buzzword was Process Action Team (PAT), not reinvented. In May 1991, DSAA chartered a Security Assistance Training Support PAT. After eight months of study it was the conclusion of this PAT “. . . (that given the resources, the) ideal is for the training execution agency to remain as close to the student and training activity as possible, as is the case with our current decentralized activities attached to the service training command.”

There were two overriding reasons for this conclusion that was upheld by higher authority. First and foremost, training and equipping the forces is a responsibility of the three military departments and therefore any training in their areas should properly reside with them. The second reason is that if the training agents cannot secure quotas in ongoing courses there will be no security assistance training program. This in fact is the Achilles heel of the entire process, and

we have been so successful in the past that it is not obvious to higher authority. This success has come at the some cost as the military departments have drastically cut training capacity and tried to eliminate international students when there was not enough capacity for all. The cost is increasing workloads for the training arena as they continuously act as the military departments advocate for international training and fight for their fair share of the capacity. Only a training agent closely associated with the military department training command could perform this function. This is also an important argument for not combining training areas with headquarter commands more interested in policy and acquisition matters, as training would soon become the forgotten stepchild.

Procedures

If reorganization is not the answer, then where will the savings come from to provide the training community with the tools it needs for the 21st century? For the most part the answer lies in making a fundamental change in the way we do business. Currently only fifteen percent of the security assistance training program is IMET and other associated Congressional programs. These are the most closely managed, closely controlled programs we have, but the fact is this is not likely to change given Congressional interest and State Department involvement. They are well accepted, understood, and universally viewed as an important contributor to our foreign policy goals. They do not need to be reinvented! The place to start then is with FMS which accounts for eighty-five percent of the security assistance training programs. This is the area that has received the majority of outside criticism and the area that promises the most gain in efficiency from reinvention. The FMS process will be addressed in three parts: the business chain of command, letters of acceptance (LOA) and financial considerations.

It is common place in industry today to put the supplier in direct contact with the customer, to do away with the checking and quality control personnel, and to concentrate on developing a zero defect process. Today five levels are already involved in each FMS transaction – DSCA, the military department policy command, the provider (military department training agency), the country security assistance officer and the foreign customer. Why can't the customer be in direct contact with the provider? Yes, the others have a responsibility for quality control and policy enforcement, but they can adequately perform these functions as an observer rather than a direct participant and spend their time insuring the process contains whatever controls they require to reach zero defects. Actually the recommendation is not as extreme as it may seem. Training representatives now attend annual training planning conferences where they accept requirements from an SAO and return to process these requirements without any other higher level involvement. Additionally, most annual requirements are the same year after year. For example, ninety percent of NETSAFA's annual requirements are recurring. Only when new major weapons systems are sold or the political climate changes is there significant changes to the program.

Again using NETSAFA as an example, fifty-six percent of its LOAs are for less than \$250,000. With a 2.5 percent administration fee, we are losing money on each of these LOAs just to process them, let alone pay for the case execution, reconciliation, and closing expenses. Why can't small LOAs incur a higher fee to cover all costs? Why do we have to write a LOA particularly for fixed price, off the shelf items? Why can't the customer pay by check, or by credit card against a line of credit, or at a minimum a very stripped down blanket order for training? New, sensitive training, or expensive training could still follow the current rules but by eliminating a majority of the training from the LOA process would remove a manpower intensive and currently frustrating procedure.

The last major procedure change involves the way we manage the customer's money. One of the biggest customer complaints is that we cannot accurately provide timely information on case balances. One of the financial manager's biggest complaints is that they cannot reconcile transactions through the service and DFAS financial systems. Why can't the customer's payments be placed in a commercial bank and paid out as billed by the training agent? Training agents currently receive checks for training provided to commercial or outside public agencies so part of such a system is already in place. Any bank has a record of every deposit, every payment and can give an accurate balance at any time. If the bank could earn interest on the funds deposited, with the large amount of money involved here, there could be no charge or limited charges, for their services, thus saving the training command a great deal of work and expense.

None of the three proposals made in this section would necessarily provide more resources but they would be much more effective, reduce manpower requirements significantly, and most importantly go a long way towards providing increased customer satisfaction.

Resources

FMS administrative funds have been cut severely over the last five years. These cuts were made on the premises that total FMS sales were declining and therefore FMS administrative surcharge receipts would decline. In most cases these cuts were passed down the chain of command as a straight percentage with no regard to actual changes in workload of the recipients. In actuality as countries cut back on big-ticket items, they increased their requirements for training and spare parts to keep their old systems operating. As total FMS decreased, training requirements actually increased, some twenty percent. At the same time IMET workload, especially in respect to managing Expanded IMET mobile education teams increased. Historically FMS tended to support IMET, but this is no longer possible and IMET must begin to pick up its true cost of operations. On top of this, Congress has imposed a cap on the amount of funds DSCA can spend on administrative overhead, therefore, the chances that there will be any immediate increase in funding levels is dim at best.

How then is the training community going to find the resources it needs to hire an adequate number of country and financial managers, support personnel, including limited organizational ADP capability, conduct training of its personnel and accomplish the travel necessary to advertise our product and provide customer satisfaction? Here again we need to look out of the box to find additional avenues of financial support.

First of all we need better budget planning and coordination. Authorized budget levels need to be promulgated prior to the execution year, not in the first or second quarter when it is too late to adjust. Commands should be encouraged and required to fully state and justify shortfalls. Budget calls that set a predetermined level of funding and direct that unfunded items not be included are self-defeating. Not only do they give our employees the perception that higher management is indifferent but more importantly they deny high management the facts they need to fight for equitable funding.

Second, we should decline to assume additional tasking such as EIPC or INM or whatever, unless we are provided additional up front compensation either in the form of canceling some ongoing programs or increasing our budget baseline to pay for administering the new program.

Third, we should look at alternative sources of resources. Since the three military department training agents are echelon three organizations, why can't some or all of their operating costs be charged to the course cost just as the schoolhouse cost is? Yes, this would raise course costs but our customers might be more sympathetic if they have faster and more responsive service and up-to-date financial accounting data. Another avenue to explore is more use of program management and technical support lines in training cases. Program Management lines in "T" cases have been restricted but there are many programs where these should be fully warranted. It is up to the training community to fully justify their use, but if we did some additional resources could be generated. Technical support lines should be used whenever the training to be provided is not off-the-shelf, ongoing courses. More and more training is being tailored for the customer or contractors are replacing military instructors, and all of this must be funded and managed. There may be other ideas for new funding sources. All need to be explored, as it does not appear that traditional sources are sufficient to maintain a robust training community.

Information Systems

Much has been said above about DSAMS. Regardless of its growing problems, DSAMS is here to stay. It is our future, and it has had, and should continue to have, the support of the training community. Unfortunately, DSAMS has been overly sold as the end all of everyone's problems. "Just wait until DSAMS comes on line" is a common answer to criticisms of the current systems. But DSAMS is only a tool, and it is not the only tool.

In our desire to have a working training module, we need to be careful we do not overly restrict the developing agent from using approaches that may be a little different than what we are used to. They must have the authority to develop a standard presentation method to be used by all. Granted, the overall assembling of data elements and their relationship on screens and reports must be directed by the end users, while ensuring preservation of the current business rules. But, does it really matter whether this button or that button is pushed or a date is typed in as long as the final result of the action is completed as required by the user? Developers need to be given the liberty to create a usable system that will perform the task it is programmed to do and not be bound to the arduous requirement of trying to do this task in the same presentation manner as it is done today.

As it has been stated many times before, and now is becoming readily apparent to many, though training is small in size and cost, it is a complex and dynamic business machine. Are the business practices and user needs as readily compatible with the logistics side of security assistance as previously thought? The current system architecture appears to be selected for a more transaction-based, batch-oriented system, where the preponderance of users are located within a local area network. The training community has many different needs. Their users are spread throughout the world, and each has a wide variety of permissions and need to know aspects to the data. They need a real time online interactive system that can provide current up to the minute data. DSAMS has been handcuffed trying to create such a system while staying compatible with the overall logistics based scheme.

Would it be prudent at this time for DSCA to review the current design process of the training module? Which is more cost effective, to continue on the current path with a known end product that will not meet the needs of all security assistance users, or change course in the middle to take advantage of current technology? For some users, the developing DSAMS training module

will not provide any enhancements or capabilities that are not presently available within the current legacy system.

It is time to consider an alternative idea: to separate the training module as a separate system from DSAMS with an interface to utilize the current case development module and develop an all encompassing system that is able to meet the needs of all training users now. How much savings can be generated by rolling together the service legacy systems, the Security Assistance Network (SAN), and the Training Management System (TMS)? It would seem judicious to follow the rest of the commercial ADP industry and investigate the abilities of a Web browser-based system. There are numerous advantages to this approach such as eliminating user PC incompatibilities as well as cross walking on other applications, and there is no need for users to run lengthy upgrades, since all are done in one location, the server. There are development cost savings, as proven in the commercial business world, Web browser-based systems are easier and quicker to develop. And since the screens are dynamically generated for each user at the time of demand, it has a great ability to reuse screens and code, as well as to be able to tailor each screen to that particular user's permission and requirements.

Much of the work already done by DSADC can still be retained. The requirements gathered and screens developed for Release 7 and 8 can be used in the development of this separate system and will not have to be repeated. One change to the current design would be to locate the main database servers where the majority of changes occur, and that would be at the MILDEP'S headquarters. Multiple servers are not a problem for this architecture design; in fact it can be advantageous. This would allow headquarter users to access data via a LAN for quicker response times, but still allow remote users the same access capabilities via the Internet. This approach is set forth to stimulate the thought that there might be a different and better way, and that sometimes changing the direction of a project in the middle is the most cost-effective answer. As a first step we need to define what an alternative might look like and what it might cost to develop.

One last comment regarding the management of information systems needs to be made. There is a trend today in government, and to a certain extent in business, to contract out much of our information systems and to capitalize in-house ADP assets to pay for the contracting out. If taken to an extreme we could be left with no internal capability and at the mercy of outsiders. They have no vested interest, no knowledge of our problems and therefore no incentive to find better ways to do our business. It has been our internal ADP personnel working closely with our operators who have been instrumental in introducing improvements in operations that have allowed us to take on more work with fewer resources. Training is a fast moving program that often requires overnight changes to the data system and processes, changes that cannot wait for outside support. Each training activity must have some residual in-house capabilities to develop and implement instant program changes that increase capabilities or lessen our workload.

Personnel

Our training work force has been gutted by almost a decade of downsizing. Staffing reductions have exceeded workload increases, and we are clearly at the point where we are doing less with less. The training work force is frustrated and burned out by what they perceive as higher level indifference or at best an inability to solve the problem. Streamlining initiatives have not offset the impact of work force reductions and in to many cases have placed additional requirements on already over burdened workers. For example, the implementation of the Case

Development Module (CDM) of DSAMS Navy's LOA decentralization initiatives, and the well intended initiative of DSCA to standardize the LOA process has almost doubled the time it takes NETSAFA to process a LOA from less than 40 days to over 74 days. Many of our aging staff will become eligible for retirement in the next 2-5 years. This may offer an opportunity to build a whole new culture but to accomplish this we need to establish a task force to examine how to make the most of the people we will have. Do we need a career field? Do we need more and better training? Do we want to adjust our talents by bringing in more modern business and technology skills? How do we attract the people we want? The answer to these questions and others will determine our future. Now is the time to begin coordinating work force planning for the training community!

Conclusion

The security assistance community is not broken, indeed they should be commended for their foresight, initiative, and resolve to assume ever increasing requirements in the face of never ending cuts. But the security assistance community has gone about as far as it can. Personnel are overworked and frustrated. Responses are slower, errors are being made and important steps such as case closure are falling further and further behind. Future trends are not encouraging. In order for us to continue to provide the excellent quality of service our customers has been accustomed to expect and deserve, we are going to have to make some fundamental changes in the way we do business. This paper has set forth some suggestions. They are not original, and there are many others that should be reviewed. Those of us who understand our environment best have an obligation to try to shape our future. Let the debate begin!

About the Author

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